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**Kent County Celebrates 15 Years of
Intentional Diversity & Inclusion Efforts**

GRAND RAPIDS – The nearly 1700 employees of Kent County represent a variety of ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds. Over the past 15 years, the County has worked hard to make sure Kent County is a workplace where diversity and inclusion matter. The **Cultural Insight Council** (CIC) was born out of this dedication to reflect our population and embrace the very things that make us unique. January 2016 marks the 15th anniversary of the CIC and its work.

The CIC is a self-directed, interdepartmental workgroup sponsored by the County Administrator/Controller's Office dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The council is comprised of employees from diverse backgrounds, representing all levels of the organization.

County Administrator Daryl Delabbio, back in the year 2000, directed a Staff Insight Subcommittee "to study and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners regarding the County's interaction and relationships with people of color in employment, purchasing and otherwise." After review, the subcommittee reached the following conclusions:

- Kent County had made a significant effort to ensure that its employment and purchasing practices were open, competitive and offered equal opportunity;
- The County had seen a commitment and steady increase in the number of minorities represented in its workforce; and
- The County recognized there was room for improvement.

As a result, the Administrator's Office formed the CIC in January of 2001. "We had to be sure we were doing what is right, what is equitable, and what is fair," reflected Delabbio. "The Cultural Insight Council provided a chance for us to do better for our employees, our partners and our entire community." Its mission is ***"To act as a catalyst to foster a culture which recognizes, accepts and values the individual differences of its employees and is responsive to the changing needs of our diverse community."***

Fifteen years later, diversity and inclusion remain critical components of the Kent County organization. "It is important that the people who serve the residents of Kent County understand and embrace diversity, but that they are also a reflection of the people who live here," said Commissioner Dan Koorndyk, who served as Chair of the Board of Commissioners from 2013-2015. "We can learn so much from one another if we open our minds and our hearts. It's wonderful to have a workgroup within the County that makes sure we are being culturally competent, intentionally diverse, inclusive and equitable."

Diversity and inclusion is reflected in all core elements of our organization, including the County's mission,

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values and tagline **"Kent County...Where Diversity & Inclusion Matter."** "During my fifteen years as a Commissioner, I've seen consistent and steady improvement in Kent County's affirmation and support of a diverse and inclusive work force," said Commissioner Jim Talen, District 15. "This is not easy work. But the innovative efforts of the CIC, along with thoughtful leadership from County staff and elected officials, make me optimistic that Kent County will continue to shine as an employer of choice for everyone in our community."

The CIC has gained a reputation for inclusion with various organizations countywide. "The Grand Rapids Urban League would like to recognize the commitment that has been made by Kent County to become a more inclusive and diverse organization over the years and the myriad intentional efforts they've undertaken in the process," stated Joe Jones of the Grand Rapids Urban League. "To their credit, Kent County has continued to delve into this work by working with local experts in the area of inclusion and diversity and we believe it will pay great dividends as the county demographic continues to change and look more like the society in which we live. The more informed we are as a community, the better. Thank you, Kent County!"

County leaders say they are thrilled that 2016 marks the 15th anniversary of the development of the CIC. "Kent County is proud of the many accomplishments and achievements that have been made by the CIC and the organization as a whole," said Darius Quinn, Human Resources Manager and Chair of the CIC. "More importantly, we are excited about where the organization is headed." Quinn added that over the next several years, the CIC along with County departments will:

- Engage in strategic planning around diversity, inclusion and equity;
- Work to increase leadership engagement in diversity, inclusion and equity work in Kent County;
- Promote greater awareness around racial, gender, and LGBTQ equity within the organization;
- Act proactively in partnership with Kent County's justice and legal systems in an effort to avoid any form of tension within the diverse communities that we serve.

"Kent County has made strides in diversity and inclusion over the past 15 years and has been intentional in celebrating the diversity in our community," added Jorge Gonzalez, Executive Director of the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "I am glad that Kent County celebrates Hispanic Heritage month and highlights local and national Hispanic leaders, as well as its local Hispanic workforce. From hosting monthly Chamber membership meetings, participating in our annual business expo, to communicating weekly career opportunities with us, we are proud to call Kent County a trusted and valued partner."

Recently, the CIC took part in creating a video: *"We Are Kent County"* shows our employee's dedication to service, diversity and inclusion. It is being used during new employee orientations, job fairs, shared on social media and accessKent.com, and played on local access TV when Commission meetings are broadcast. The video has also been placed on a newly-created Youtube.com channel for Kent County. See the video online at <https://youtu.be/kVGhaH6PCQM>.

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